



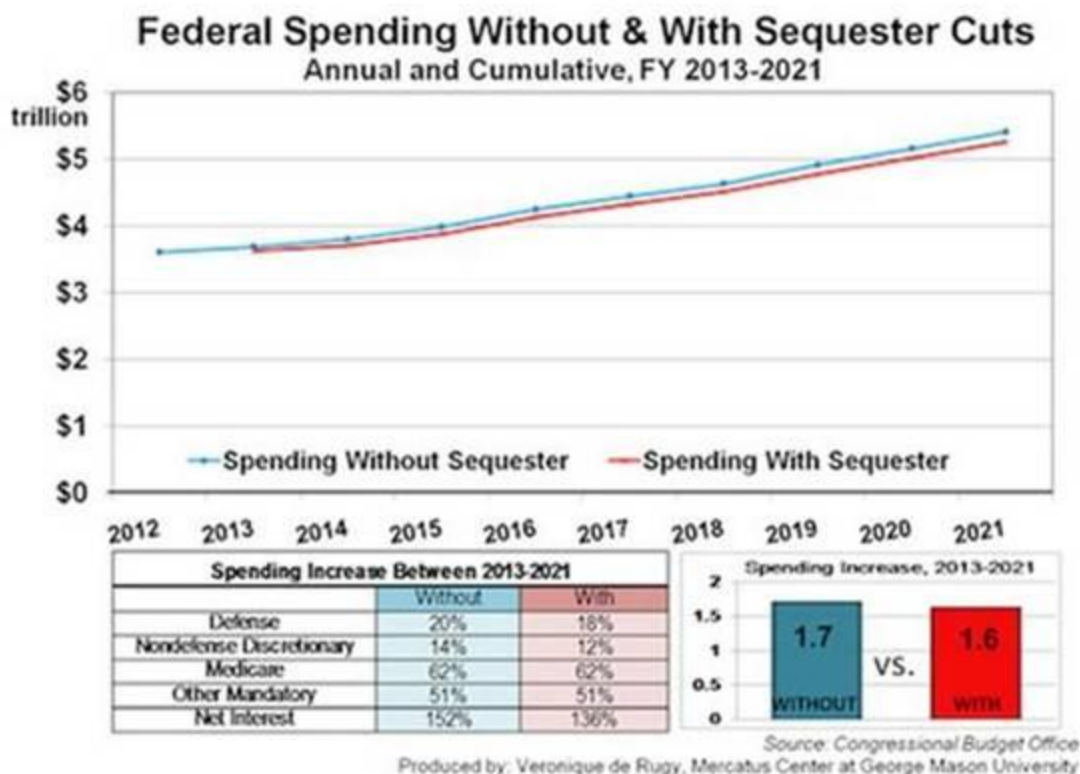
The Budget and Spending Task Force
Rep. Rob Woodall, Task Force Chairman

Conservative Support for the Sequester

- “This [sequester] is the most ridiculously hyped Armageddon since the Mayan Calendar. In fact, it’s made [to] look worse than the Mayan Calendar.” – Charles Krauthammer
- “The federal government has grown inexorably for decades. Our president casts himself as a Solomonic manager, and yet he is saying that absent a few extra pennies on every dollar, there’s no way he can maintain government’s core functions? A manager in any other field of human endeavor would be fired on the spot for making such an argument. But in Washington, this passes for leadership.” – Jonah Goldberg
- “The Obama administration is whipping up hysteria over the sequester budget cuts and their impact on the economy, the military, first providers, and so forth and so on...But if you climb into the Congressional Budget Office numbers for 2013, you see a much lighter and easier picture than all the worst-case scenarios being conjured up by the administration.” – Larry Kudlow
 - Under the sequester, total discretionary outlays in 2013 will fall to a level not seen since 2009, that oh-so-frugal year in which President Obama and the Pelosi-led Congress passed their failed \$1 trillion stimulus package. (FY 2009 Discretionary Outlays of \$1,238 Billion (OMB) and FY 2013 Discretionary Outlays of \$1,213 Billion (CBO)).

Conservative Opposition

- “It is not helpful when Congress and the president and the administration have such partisan gridlock. Because their gridlock has real repercussions on the families ... it has real repercussions on our states and our economies.” – Gov. Mary Fallin (R-OK)
- “The sequester was put in place to be a hammer, not a policy.” – Gov. Bob McDonnell (R-VA)



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Noonan: Government by Freakout

The president's sequester strategy is like Howard Beale in "Network": "Woe is us. . . . And woe is us! We're in a lot of trouble!" It is always cliffs, ceilings and looming catastrophes with [Barack Obama](#). It is always government by freakout. That's what's happening now with the daily sequester warnings. Seven hundred thousand children will be dropped from Head Start. Six hundred thousand women and children will be dropped from aid programs.

Meat won't be inspected. Seven thousand TSA workers will be laid off, customs workers too, and air traffic controllers. Lines at airports will be impossible. The Navy will slow down the building of an aircraft carrier. Troop readiness will be disrupted, weapons programs slowed or stalled, civilian contractors stiffed, uniformed first responders cut back. Our nuclear deterrent will be indefinitely suspended. Ha, made that one up, but give them time. Mr. Obama has finally hit on his own version of national unity: Everyone get scared together.

Obviously the potential budget cuts that the administration is announcing—well, not announcing but warning of—are the kind that would cause maximum pain, inconvenience or alarm. Obviously too, the administration doesn't want to be clear about exactly who might be affected, how or when. Let the imaginative dwell on the extent of the menace; let them do it on cable news. In a way it's all brilliant showbiz: Scare people into supporting your position. But we've been through it before, and you wonder, again, why a triumphant president and a battered Republican House majority can't reach a responsible agreement.

And then you remind yourself why. Because Mr. Obama thrives in chaos. He flourishes in unsettled circumstances and grooves on his own calm. He spins an air of calamity, points fingers and garners support. His only opponent is a hapless, hydra-headed House. America has a weakness for winners, and Republicans just now do not look like winners. They have many voices but no real voice, and no one saying anything that makes you stop and think.

Mr. Obama, on the other hand, is a singular character who tells you in measured tones that we must have measured answers. Half the country finds his politics to be too much to one side, but his temperament is not extreme and he often looks reasonable. With this gift he ties his foes in knots to get what he wants, which is higher taxes. He wants the rich to pay more and those he judges to be in need to receive more. End of story. Debt and deficits don't interest him, except to the extent he must give them lip service. And so far this seems to be working fine for him. A USA Today/Pew Research Center poll out this week reported half the respondents said it will be the Republicans' fault if the sequester goes through. Only a third said they'd blame the president.

So it's tempting to see this moment as part of the continuing saga of Obama Triumphant. But I'm not so sure. Short-term you can win the way the president wins, but long-term? No, that's not the way to go. Government by freakout carries a price. It wears people down. It doesn't inject a sense of energy, purpose or confidence in those who do business in America, it does the opposite.

The other day I was in a [Wal-Mart](#) in southern Florida. It was Sunday afternoon on a holiday weekend but even accounting for that the mood and look of the place was different from what it was two and five years ago. Then, things seemed dynamic—what buys, what an array of products, what bustle in the aisles. This time it seemed tired, frayed, with fewer families and scarcer employees. It looked like a diorama of the Great Recession.

What effect do all the successive fiscal cliffs, ceilings and sequesters, have on public confidence? On the public's spirit? They only add to the sense that Washington is dysfunctional and cannot possibly help us out of the mire. It shows the world we lurch from crisis to crisis by habit now. This makes us look incapable and beset. It further sours the sourest White House-Capitol Hill relationship of modern political history. That relationship probably can't get worse—it was actually breaking news this week that the president picked up a phone and called a Republican senator—but it's not good to see no possibility of repair.

It leaves the vulnerable feeling more anxious, and the sophisticated feeling more jerked around. The president is usually called popular, but his poll numbers are well below Bill Clinton's and Ronald Reagan's at this point in their presidencies. He's pretty much stuck at George W. Bush's levels. The president and his people overestimate his position in this 50-50 country. Beyond that, the president damages himself with his cleverness. At the end of the day he looks incapable of creating a sense of stability. The thing he misses as he shrewdly surveys the field is what he is: the president. He is the man people expect to lead, to be wiser. He is the one they expect to come up with a plan that is a little more than Let's Threaten Catastrophe.

As Ron Fournier asked in a spirited piece in National Journal, is the fiscal standoff "just about scoring political points, or is it about governing? If it's all about politics, bully for Obama. A majority of voters will likely side with the president over Republicans. . . . If it's about governing, the story changes: In any enterprise, the chief executive is ultimately accountable for success and failure. . . . There is only one president."

Republicans on the Hill, of course, are being cast as the nihilists in the drama, as the ones who want to blow things up. But is that even remotely fair? They just lost a battle on taxes—they fought, got their heads handed to them and accepted an increase in rates. What they are saying now to the president is: "OK, we gave you tax increases. Don't demand more right now. Work with us on spending cuts and a broad and coherent tax-reform plan. Don't do the kind of small, targeted loophole-closing that's just meant to torment the dread rich. Do something more solid and comprehensive. And yes, let's move to do what we can on entitlement spending." That's not very radical.

If they wanted to be nihilists—and they must sometimes feel tempted—they could be. They could let the president have everything he wants—more spending, higher taxes—while making a great rhetorical show of resistance, and then caving in. They could give him everything he asks for and let the economy suffer for it, which would help resistance to Obamanomics spread and grow. The debt and the deficit would grow. Economic malaise would continue and deepen. You could call this the H.L. Mencken approach: "Democracy," he observed, "is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard."

But congressional Republicans will not do that. Because, actually, they're not nihilists. And yes, they'd co-own the catastrophe and risk being swept out. But time may be their friend. The president looks strong now, but governing by freakout has too many costs. Again, he is overplaying his hand.

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